THE LIBRARY

BY H. L. MENCKEN

Autopsy

THE STORY OF CIVIL LIBERTY IN THE UNITED STATES, by Leon Whipple. 50 cents. 7 x 4¼; 366 pp. New York: *The Vanguard Press.*

PROFESSIONAL PATRIOTS, edited by Norman Hapgood. $1.50. 7⅜ x 4⅞; 217 pp. New York: *Albert & Charles Boni.*

RE-FORGING AMERICA, by Lothrop Stoddard. $3. 8⅛ x 5⅜; 389 pp. New York: *Charles Scribner's Sons.*

UNDERSTANDING AMERICA, by Langdon Mitchell. $3. 8¾ x 5¾; 249 pp. New York: *The George H. Doran Company.*

THESE books all belong to that literature of *Katzenjammer* which now flourishes so amazingly in the United States, vice the glad books, deceased: they all embody attempts to find out what is the matter with the Republic. I wish I could add that one or another of them solves the problem, or at least contributes something to its illumination, but that would be going somewhat beyond the facts. Even Mr. Mitchell, who is by far the most urbane and sagacious of the four authors, gets little beyond platitudes—often very adroit and charming ones, to be sure, but still platitudes. His fundamental assumptions are hard to distinguish from those of Mr. Stoddard. Both gentlemen seem to be firmly convinced that only immigrants of Northern European stock can assimilate what they vaguely describe as "American ideals." But is this actually true? I doubt it. The real objection to most of the non-Nordic immigrants, as it is practically encountered, is that they assimilate these American "ideals" only too rapidly. Nobody in New Mexico or Arizona complains against the invading Mexicans on the ground that they work more cheaply than Americans and cling to their Spanish speech; what is complained of is that they quickly learn all the dodges of American politics, and so tend to hog all the public offices, and reduce MM. the "Anglo-Saxons" of those deserts to more or less honest labor. It was precisely the same objection, then levelled against the Irish, that brought on the Know-Nothing movement: the theological content of that movement was an afterthought, as the theological content of the Ku Klux movement today is an afterthought. Ku Kluxry is the Southern poor white's answer to the progress of the emerging Negro, once his equal but now threatening to become his superior. Having perfected his weapon, he naturally turns it against other enemies. But how many of them are deficient in American "idealism"? Searching high and low, I can find none. What the Ku Klux seeks to destroy are precisely what the text-books of civics describe as the chief American "ideals," *e.g.*, equality before the law, inviolability of domicile, free speech and free assemblage, and universal education.

If, indeed, there is any faction in the United States today which devotes itself whole-heartedly to destroying the Republic's "language and law, its religious ideals, its morals, its hopes and its institutions" (I quote Mr. Mitchell), that faction is obviously the *bloc* of so-called "Anglo-Saxons" and their parasites. In Professor Whipple's melancholy volume you will find massive proofs of it, and in the volume edited by Mr. Hapgood (the materials were amassed by Sidney Howard and John Hearley) you will find more. The central aim of these "Anglo-Saxons," since the first days of the Bill of Rights, has apparently been to reduce it to a nullity. As Professor Whipple shows, it has been constantly under fire, and bit by bit its guarantees have been evaded and destroyed. All the chief heroes of American

"idealism," from Lincoln to Wilson and from Roosevelt to Wayne B. Wheeler, have devoted themselves ferociously to this curious business. I can find no parallel to it in the history of any other country. Certainly there is no record that Bismarck ever jailed anyone for hymning the Prussian monarchy, or that the Bolsheviki have ever hanged a man for advocating Bolshevism. But in the United States it has always been risky to seek to exercise the rights which, in theory, lie inviolably at the heart of the American system of government, and of late it has even come to be dangerous to argue for them.

Messrs. Whipple and Hapgood tell only a small part of the story: their volumes might have been extended to 5,000 pages each without exhausting the facts. The Bill of Rights, as it stands today, is only of historical interest, at all events to a man who happens to be unpopular. If he goes into court relying upon it to deliver him from oppression he will find straightway that the courts have translated every one of its crystal-clear asseverations into legal moonshine, signifying nothing. Any search or seizure that seems proper to a Prohibition officer is now "reasonable." Free speech means simply the right to utter what is believed by the nearest Rotarian; free assemblage is a privilege granted by the police; a free press is subject to the censorship of obscure and unintelligent job-holders. Religious freedom means government by the Methodist Board of Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals, which elects lawmakers, controls administrative officers, and appoints judges. The right of a man accused of crime to trial before a jury of his peers has come to mean, in large areas, only the right to trial before a jury of his hereditary enemies. Even such ancient legal principles as that which prohibits double jeopardy are now suspended, and on the motion of "Anglo-Saxons." An American's house is no longer his castle. He may be tried by irresponsible administrative tribunals without being confronted by his accusers. Theoretically, a free citizen in a free republic, and safeguarded in a long series of inalienable rights by inviolable guarantees, he is actually simply the subject of a *Polizeistaat*, without any certain means of escaping its oppressions save that of fleeing the country.

My natural prejudices, as one of the few genuine Anglo-Saxons ever on public view in this realm, are in favor of the so-called Anglo-Saxon "ideals." That is to say, I believe in liberty. In any dispute between a citizen and the government, it is my instinct to side with the citizen. I am against bureaucrats, policemen, wowsers, snouters, smellers, uplifters, lawyers, bishops and all other such sworn enemies of the free man. I am against all efforts to make men virtuous by law. I believe that the government, practically considered, is simply a camorra of incompetent and mainly dishonest men, transiently licensed to live by the labor of the rest of us. I am thus in favor of limiting its powers as much as possible, even at the cost of a considerable inconvenience, and of giving every citizen, wise or foolish, right or wrong, the right to criticize it freely, and to advocate changes in its constitution and personnel. In brief, the concept of American "ideals, morals, hopes and institutions" that I subscribe to is substantially the concept that Thomas Jefferson subscribed to. I do not share his confidence in the wisdom and rectitude of the common man, but I go with him in his belief that the very commonest of common men has certain inalienable rights. No country, it seems to me, may call itself free and enlightened in which even the meanest and most friendless wretch is at the mercy of oppressors, and stands at a disadvantage before the law.

What I marvel at is that so few "Anglo-Saxons"—and here I adopt the naïve definition of Anglo-Saxon used by Messrs. Mitchell and Stoddard—are in favor of these principles. It seems to me that they are the very foundation-stones of the American scheme of things—that remov-

ing them means bringing the whole structure down in ruin. Yet it must be plain to anyone who studies the books of Messrs. Whipple and Hapgood that this business of removing them is now the chief endeavor of the "Anglo-Saxons," and that they strive mightily to make it the chief function of the government. When protests are heard, they come almost invariably from persons who are not "Anglo-Saxons." Such persons man the few libertarian organizations that still flourish among us, and they are the chief butts of the frenzy of hatred that Messrs. Whipple and Hapgood describe. To be an American patriot today, in the current "Anglo-Saxon" sense, is to be a relentless enemy of practically every idea that Jefferson advocated. If he were alive today, he would be on every list of suspects, along with Jane Addams and John Dewey, Father John A. Ryan and Roscoe Pound. Had he been alive during the late war, with the frenzied Woodrow in the saddle, he would have gone to prison with Debs—and Washington, alive too, would have gone with them. The defense of the Bill of Rights among us has been left mainly to men who fall quite outside Messrs. Mitchell and Stoddard's definition of Americans. And in large part, by an irony that must surely delight the gods, it has been left to men actually under the surveillance of the police.

In this curious situation there ought to be some comfort for Messrs. Mitchell and Stoddard, and especially for Mr. Mitchell —that is, if he really means what he says when he declares that he is in favor of the traditional "ideals, morals, hopes and institutions" of the Republic,—for what it indicates is simply that the more recent immigrants are more readily susceptible to Americanization than the children of the old stock. Do I here try to make a paradox? Not at all. I believe that it is really a fact. The main trouble with large sections of the new immigrants is that they take American ideals quite seriously—that they come to the United States honestly expecting to find the liberties that Jefferson advocated. If they become bad citizens it is at least partly due to their natural reaction from the discovery that nothing of the sort is on tap. The lowly wop, escaping from his native Sicily, comes here to be a free man. What he actually encounters is a legal system which reduces him to the level of a school-boy—a system which goes to the extravagant length of determining what he shall drink at his own table. Is it any wonder that he becomes a bootlegger? Would the men who won the West have submitted, or would they have become bootleggers too? Soon the wop notices something else. He himself is pursued by the police and sent to jail, but his "Anglo-Saxon" customers, guilty just as he is, go free. So on his release from jail he becomes, perhaps, a Bolshevik, or maybe only a gun-man. If you think I strain the facts, go read the case list of any Federal rum court. Nine-tenths of the names upon it are "foreign" names. Thus even when he is a bootlegger the "Anglo-Saxon" has vast and unfair advantages: his client has vaster still. In precisely the same way, everywhere south of the Potomac, the "Anglo-Saxon" has advantages over the black man, even when he is a murderer. I challenge Mr. Mitchell to fit this harsh fact into any American "ideal" that he is in favor of. Or to do the same with the facts amassed by Messrs. Hapgood and Whipple. The plain fact is that all the traditional American "ideals" are now on the scrap-heap. A few "foreigners" root among them, searching for lost pearls, but the "Anglo-Saxons" pass by on the other side of the street.

Mr. Mitchell marvels that the alleged idealism of the American people is viewed with mocking by Europeans. He is not surprised to discover that the Germans all believe the United States went into the late war to recover payment for its services, as a "neutral," to the Allies, but he is astounded to find that "most Frenchmen and Italians say the same thing." These Frenchmen and Italians, he believes, are singu-

larly forgetful of "the generous, chivalrous sentiment amongst our people during the years before we took sides in the great matter." What he forgets himself is that there is such a thing as a science of logic, and that it still flourishes in France and Italy, where Kiwanis has, as yet, failed to upset it. Suppose a Frenchman begins to figure out what would have happened if the investments of the United States, in 1917, had been with the Germans instead of with the Allies. Is it likely that, knowing what he knows, he is going to ascribe much importance to "the cherished memory of Lafayette"? Or to "the regard in which we hold France"? That regard, to a Frenchman, seems to have set him back very painfully. There are, to be sure, Frenchmen who do not think so. I have met them, and, as a 100% American, greatly enjoyed their humane conversation. But it would be drowning them in their own politeness to speak of them as logicians.

Caveat Against Science

SCIENCE: THE FALSE MESSIAH, by C. E. Ayres. $3. 8¼ x 5¾; 296 pp. Indianapolis: *The Bobbs-Merrill Company.*

MR. AYRES, lately a member of the staff of the *New Republic*, has served his time as a professor of philosophy, and, like any other metaphysician in a machine age, is full of vague fevers and shooting pains. In the present volume he endeavors gallantly to reduce them to a series of theses, with supporting syllogisms, but though he enjoys the gift of utterance and is, in fact, extraordinarily articulate for a philosopher, his argument remains, nevertheless, somewhat inchoate. What I gather from it chiefly is the thought that science, after all, cannot teach us how to live. It accumulates immense pyramids of facts, but the facts turn out, on examination, to be meaningless. What if the astronomers discover that the temperature at the core of a certain star is 750,000 degrees Centrigrade? What if the electron reveals itself as a speck of vacuum performing a witless and eternal Charleston? What if epinephrin is synthesized, and even Gordon gin? What if a distinguished movie actor is found to be a perfect specimen of *Eoanthropus dawsoni?* What if some one proves that a straight line is no longer the shortest distance between two points? All the really important human problems remain unsolved. Nothing in any of these triumphs of science will help a man to determine whether, having $50 to invest, he will do better to put it in the missionary box or buy some worthy girl a pocket-flask and a set of necking tools. Mr. Ayres, it appears, long ago gave up any hope of light from the purely physical sciences: chemistry, physics, pathology, physiology, zoölogy, chiropractic, investment banking, golf, etc. But psychology still lured him, and he began to investigate it—just in time to see the behaviorists turn Man into a teetotum, not unlike the electron. There remained anthropology, but now even anthropology runs to graphs and tables of statistics, laws and more laws, all impersonal, all devoid of metaphysical content, all extremely mortifying to a philosopher.

Mr. Ayres seems to have a fear that the end is not yet—that science, having turned its back upon the moral order of the world, will one day return to put it down, maybe by force—that is, that we are facing a scientific tyranny almost as bad as the old theological tyranny or the current political tyranny. "When science has become supreme," he says, in the last sentence of his book, "any attempt to rectify its formulæ will be persecuted as heresy." But here, I believe, he is simply judging science in terms of the crimes of philosophy. There is not the slightest sign that science, in itself, has any such malign ambition. Its aim is simply to establish the facts. It has no more interest in the moral significance of those facts than it has in the moral significance of a streptococcus. It must be amoral by its very nature: the minute it begins separating facts into the two categories of good ones and bad ones it ceases to be